Chapter 9:

The Presidio and the Future

As the twentieth century ended, the most beautiful spaces in the nation increasingly felt like private property. Especially along American coasts, the dollar value of real estate grew exponentially and public space on the coasts became harder to find. Some states, such as Hawaii, declared all beaches public property, but access to the shore became difficult to find and even harder to preserve. A dimension of exclusivity rose around coastal areas; more and more, the beauty of the shoreline became a status symbol of distance from the mainstream in American society. This transformation accentuated a rising class division in the United States, much exacerbated by the unbridled economic climate of the 1980s, best labeled with the ethos of the fictional Gordon Gekko in Oliver Stone's 1987 film *Wall Street*, "greed is good," and made into national dogma with the enormous stock market run-up of the 1990s.[420]

The only hedge against the privatization of the coast and all it meant about the concept of American democracy was public open space and conservationists stood in the vanguard against the privatization of precious public lands. As the national park had been the American contribution to the idea of democracy, public spaces of all kinds remained one of the perceivable levelers in American society, one of the few mechanisms left to dispel growing notions of the perquisites of privilege. In the always expensive, increasingly redeveloped, and class-riven Bay Area by the end of the 1980s, open public space often meant one of the units of Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The park symbolized the concept of public space, firmly placing public over private, a genuine hedge against the privatization of the region's most cherished features. From the Marin Headlands to Sweeney Ridge, the park included not only coast and beach, but a range of green space, places where the public could enjoy the region's beauty in shared space. It had become the place where people interacted in the crowded spaces of the city, a multi-faceted space that held great significance to not only the privileged but nearly everyone in the Bay Area.

Against that backdrop, the announcement of the closing of the Army base at the Presidio and its transfer by law to Golden Gate National Recreation Area served as a pivotal moment in the history of the Bay Area park and indeed the national park system. Often described as one of the finest pieces of property in the United States, the Presidio was spectacular urban recreational space filled with valuable cultural resources as well as prime territory for commercial and very high-end residential development. Estimates of its private-sector value ranged from $500 million to $20 billion, leaving the growth coalition, that sector of the business community that benefited from development, salivating. The military presence at the Presidio provided the sole reason it had not been developed long before the 1990s. Its status as public land made it more than simply desirable space along the coast of the Pacific Ocean. It also became a symbolic antidote to the problems of American society, to the class and cultural differences that increasingly tore at the nation's social fabric. At the moment of the announcement of the transfer to the Park Service, the Presidio became an emblem of nearly everything important about the cultural past in a changing society. It simultaneously represented the end of the Cold War, the fundamental alteration of Bay

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[420] Oliver Stone, *Wall Street*, 35 mm, (Los Angeles, Twentieth Century Fox, 1987).

Area's economy, the commitment to public endeavor in the region and beyond, the idea of shared public space for recreation and preservation, and in many ways the concept of democracy in a post-industrial society. In its transformation from "post to park," a phrase coined by the Presidio Planning Team, the Presidio truly seemed poised to become all things to all people. "When the historic Presidio's 1,480 acres of strikingly beautiful headlands are turned to civilian use," the *San Francisco Chronicle* observed, "San Francisco will enjoy a gift unmatched by any other city on the globe."[421]

The Presidio was perhaps the most tempting piece of urban real estate in the country. Astride the Golden Gate, the Presidio seemed to be a canvas on which the wonderfully fractious and politically astute communities of San Francisco and the Bay Area could paint their desires. The Presidio was beautiful and lush, full of stunning and even breathtaking views, with a remarkable array of historic structures, native and exotic plants, wildlife, bicycle trails, and roads. Two major commuter routes bisected the post, making it a focus of urban traffic planning as well as park preparation. The nearly 1,500-acre enclave was an anomaly, its development fixed in time by the transformation of the Army and Phil Burton's far-sighted legislative action that had prevented new construction. In one of the nation's most expensive cities, the Presidio offered a safety valve of the kind Frederick Jackson Turner envisioned when he talked of the closing of the frontier a century before. Its location in the heart of a densely populated region and its potential definition as a combination of urban green space and community living and working space could serve as a way to ease the tension of a packed urban area. The reinvention of the Presidio also served as a powerful symbol of what San Francisco could become, and everyone who sought to define the space simultaneously sought to put their stamp on the city as well.

Yet the military's departure from the Presidio left an enormous hole in the Bay Area's economy. During the 1980s military expenditures increased dramatically, adding to a sense of well-being for communities in which the military had an extensive presence. The end of the Cold War provided an enormous shock; from Los Alamos, New Mexico, to San Francisco, many communities found that the lifeline that had long supported them first diminished and sometimes disappeared. Large segments of the Bay Area were outraged when news came that the Presidio would be closed along with more than fifty other bases across the nation. The Defense Department's Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) estimated that the closing of the Presidio would save $50.2 million each year and yield an additional one-time savings of more than $313 million.[422] By any measure, these numbers represented significant economic activity in the Bay Area, a genuine loss for the community and region – even if the resulting transfer helped alleviate regional open-space and quality of life issues.

The former U.S. Army base posed the potential for equally grand administrative problems for the Park Service. Its significance and cost dwarfed any previous Park Service endeavor, even the parks that resulted from the implementation of the famous Alaskan Native Interest Land Claims Act (ANILCA) in 1980. Because of its location in urban San Francisco, the transformation of the Presidio into a park provided an opportunity to redefine the intellectual boundaries of the Park Service at a moment when the agency struggled to fulfill the many facets of its mission. By the late 1980s, the agency was in disarray, pulled between competing missions and stripped of its powerful ties to its heroic past by external threats. The Park Service had

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[421] Stephen A. Haller, *Post and Park: A Brief Illustrated History of the Presidio of San Francisco* (San Francisco: Golden Gate National Parks Association, 1997), 39-40; "The New Presidio," *SFC*, March 8, 1992.

[422] Benson, *The Presidio*, 86-87.

always been the public's favorite federal agency; to hear itself called "an empire designed to eliminate all private property in the United States" by wise-user Ron Arnold, a sentiment later echoed by Idaho Congresswoman Helen Chenoweth, shocked an agency that believed its mission and values were at the core of American culture. Such attacks startled the agency and made it question its purpose. Many felt that its principles, so carefully articulated by Stephen T. Mather and Horace M. Albright and implemented for most of the century, had become subsumed in the quest to please a fickle Congress and an irate public.[423] The Presidio was both salve and salt in the wounds of the agency.

Although many in the agency relished the prospect of transforming the Presidio into a national park, the project demanded expertise and resources far greater than those available. The Park Service had little experience with the kind of economic management that the transformation of the post demanded. The agency had a long history of developing parks from public land, but far less experience with transfiguring large plots of urban and suburban real estate. Some questioned whether the Presidio ought to be a park at all. Park Service Director James M. Ridenour, a George H. W. Bush administration appointee, felt particular qualms about the addition. This "economic development project," in Ridenour's view, had the potential to redefine the meaning of national parks, drain agency resources, and become a key park for shaping the future of the agency in the twenty-first century. The Presidio project possessed the scope and scale to redefine the management of the park system and even more, the potential for altering the meaning of national park areas in American society.[424] Much was at stake as preparation for the transfer began.

Equally challenging was the sheer cost of running the Presidio. An initial estimate of the cost to operate the Presidio topped $45 million annually, more than twice the line item budget of Yellowstone National Park; by the late 1990s, the budget had been cut to the $25 million range, still an extraordinary sum by agency standards. One unnamed Park Service official called the entire project a "$50 million a year maintenance sinkhole."[425] Besides maintenance, the management of the cleanup of hazardous and toxic waste, and the enormous cost of rehabilitation, already a strategy to lobby for funding as much as a preservation tool, posed threats to the agency. In the most basic of terms, the Park Service lacked the resources to run the new park. Facing staff shortages throughout the park system and with more than $1 billion in deferred maintenance, the agency needed help with the capital outlay the new park required. The project's expenses, in a time when Congress regarded government spending as a vice rather than a civic virtue, compelled different tactics at the Presidio than at any other national park. From the inception, most people understood that some kind of public-private arrangement would be necessary to assist in the transformation and to manage the many assets of the Presidio that could

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[423] George Hartzog, Jr., *Battling for the National* Parks (Mt. Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell Ltd, 1988), 233-46; *national Parks for the Future: An Appraisal of the National Parks as They Begin Their Second Century in a Changing America* (Washington, DC: The Conservation Foundation, 1972), 67-74, 197-236;David Helvarg, *The War Against the Greens* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1994), 130-41; Foresta, *America's National Parks and Their Keepers*, 74-92; Hal K. Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the U.S. Since 1945* (New York: Harbrace Books, 1998), 58-64.

[424] James M. Ridenour, *The National Parks Compromised: Pork Barrel Politics and America's Treasures* (Merrillville, Indiana: ICS Books, 1994), 17, 80-81; for the impact of ANILCA, see Theodore Catton, *Inhabited Wilderness: Indians, Eskimos, and National Parks in Alaska* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

[425] Diana Scott, "Presidio for Sale," *Monitor*, December 28, 1999.

be made to pay for its public spaces. The countless structures offered an opportunity to raise funds to offset the enormous cost of historic preservation and of running the post-as-park.

But the Park Service was a resource management agency, not a commercial real estate leasing company, and the demand of Presidio management demanded reorientation of agency perspective. The Presidio was part of a park, but in a way no previous national park area had ever demanded, it was to be run in a pay-for-itself manner. In some fashion, the agency would need to be able to use the Presidio's many and varied structures to generate revenue to fund programs. Almost from the moment the transfer was slated to take place, it was clear that the Park Service would either run an enormous leasing service or would have to engage in some kind of partnership with an entity that could manage commercial and residential space. In an agency accustomed to autonomy and still reeling from the change in practice that managing urban parks demanded, this eventuality meant reassessment of internal values. Could the Park Service maintain its mission and become landlord of 6.3 million square feet of prime space on market basis?

This complicated conception lay at the heart of the tension that surrounded the transfer and its aftermath; clearly for some more traditional Park Service people, the unique situation at the Presidio threatened to redefine what national parks were and how they were funded. The tacit guarantees that had stood since 1916, national parks for the people, paid for by their taxes, and reserved for their enjoyment and use, were challenged by the creation of the Presidio Trust. Many lamented the creation of the Trust, worried that it meant the end of this ideal. "The Presidio is public land," wrote Huey D. Johnson, director of the Western Region of the Nature Conservancy in the 1960s, founder of the Trust for Public Lands in 1972, secretary of the California Resources Agency under Gov. Jerry Brown from 1978 to 1982, and president of the Resources Renewal Institute, in a clear 1996 articulation of the conventional value of public land. "The nation's parks and wilderness areas belong to all the people of the United States and are meant to be reserved for use by the people, not turned into profit-making ventures. How we deal with them is a measure of the state of American culture."[426] In the late 1980s and early 1990s, American culture had morphed into liberal consumerism, which shed any notion of community and common space and placed a dollar value on everything.

The timing of the transfer added markedly to the demands on the Park Service and to the already enormous pressure to re-envision the Presidio as a park that included non-residential space. Although it was widely acknowledged that the Army would one day depart and the organic legislation for Golden Gate National Recreation Area included the Presidio in the park when that eventuality occurred, the closing had enormous ramifications for the Bay Area. On the heels of the debilitating California recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the closing of the Presidio military base and countless other installations in the area dented the regional economy. Closure created a gap in civilian employment in San Francisco; nonmilitary workers were transferred or "riffed"—governmentese for laid off by a "reduction in force." The influx of capital from the military also dried up; it let no more contracts for the Presidio, and even the paychecks that soldiers stationed there spent in the community ceased to cycle through the regional economy. On more than one level, the Park Service was expected to help bridge the gap left by the military.

The agency had never faced such an enormous task. For most of its history, the Park Service managed parks far from urban centers. Only since the 1970s had urban management been a significant dimension of the Park Service, but in the more than twenty years that

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[426] Huey D. Johnson, "The Presidio Trust: Blueprint for Privatization," *SFE*, December 2, 1996.

followed, no park ever faced the promise and responsibility of an economic development project of this scope and size. With public-private partnerships one of the foci of efforts to change government's role in American society, the idea of bringing other entities into the management process became both politically viable and attractive to many constituencies. The Park Service seemed initially overmatched at the Presidio; its experience did not seem applicable to many of the issues it faced and the combination of not-for-profits such as GGNPA and commissions similar to the Citizens' Advisory Commission added to the expertise of professional managers seemed likely to offer a redefined Presidio that best accommodated the needs of the public. No situation lent itself more to utilization of the alliances that the Park Service nurtured for the previous twenty years in the Bay Area. In the convoluted atmosphere of the Bay Area, Golden Gate National Recreation Area unwittingly forged a base for relationships that was to prove crucial when the Presidio dropped into its lap. The combination of outreach, public hearing, conciliatory behavior, recruitment of constituent groups, and nearly every other step the Park Service took at Golden Gate National Recreation Area all seemed to lead directly to the Presidio.

The task was daunting, as all involved remembered. Despite the optimism of the initial moment, Amy Meyer recognized that the alliances so valuable elsewhere in the park and the CAC's public processes were insufficient to the task. Given fifteen years, and in need of at least $100 million for environmental remediation and roughly $600 million for capital expenses ranging from seismic protection to meeting codes and compliance, the Trust faced the largest task ever allotted to a public park.[427]

The 1972 bill that included the Presidio in Golden Gate National Recreation Area began to reverse the typical distribution of power among federal agencies in the Bay Area. After the Omnibus Bill of 1978, when the Army was forbidden from engaging in construction or demolition of structures on the Presidio or other military lands slated to become part of the park without permission of the Secretary of the Interior, the Army learned that it no longer had sole jurisdiction over the future of the Presidio. Instead of being the dominant power, it faced a watchful constituency that carefully observed the military's actions. Nevertheless, after 1978, the Army proceeded as it always had, sometimes with Park Service acquiescence, sometimes over its objections. By the mid-1980s, the Army found greater opposition to its actions, and the question of the construction of the post office in 1986 firmly illustrated that the relationship had changed. After the Army pulled back from completion of the new structure in the middle of Crissy Field, the transformation of power roles was complete. The Department of Defense usually functioned as the most powerful among federal agencies in any situation. Phil Burton's political legacy tied its hands.[428]

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 became the culmination of a redefinition of the role of the military in American society. Since World War II, defense spending had driven the economy of the Sun Belt, the states that began in Florida and stretched across the southern tier of the United States to California and up the West Coast. Defense contracting and military expenditures became an enormous part of the regional economies. Before 1940, San Antonio, Texas, and San Diego, California, stood out for their dependence on military spending. Two decades later, an entire society and culture, aptly labeled "Blue Sky California" by the writer David Beers, had

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[427] Amy Meyer to Steve Haller, February 11, 2002.

[428] John Jacobs, *A Rage for Justice: The Passion and Politics of Philip Burton* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 367; Judith Robinson, *"You're in Your Mother's Arms": The Life and Legacy of Congressman Phil Burton* (San Francisco: Mary Judith Robinson, 1994), 431-41.

taken shape. In almost every area of the Sun Belt, military presence and military spending drove the economies and provided workers and their families with unparalleled prosperity. The Sun Belt acquired the appellation "GunBelt" as a result of its dependence on all kinds of military spending.[429]

By the mid-1980s, the incredible defense buildup at the center of the Reagan administration's policies had begun to slow. Between 1976 and 1985, defense expenditures in the United States nearly tripled to more than $253 billion. After 1986, growth in expenditures came to a rapid halt, as a result of both the growing national debt, more than $220 billion in 1986 and almost $3 trillion just two years later, and the Pentagon's long-standing perception that it managed too much land and resources to effectively fulfill its mission of defending the nation. In the interest of saving weapons programs and maintaining American readiness, in 1986 Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci proposed what once would have been unthinkable: the formation of a committee to recommend the closure of military bases. This near heresy reflected the broader outlines of changing U.S. military and social policy.[430]

The end of the Cold War launched the excruciating process of closing military bases around the country. Even as Mikhail Gorbachev ascended to power in the Soviet Union and the move toward openness paralleled the decline in that nation's ability to match the United States in military spending and innovation, domestic economic pressures in the United States compelled the reassessment of spending priorities. The fall of the Berlin Wall accelerated the pace of a process already well under way; before the cataclysmic month of November 1989 ended, Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney inaugurated talk of a $150 billion "peace dividend" from cuts in military spending between 1990 and 1995. Cheney planned to eliminate twenty-five percent of the military's workpower and expected an equal reduction in its facilities.[431] On the heels of the upswing in defense spending during the Reagan administration and the economic dependency it created in towns, regions, and states across the country, the announcement of the possible closures sent shock waves through the nation.

Although the peace dividend seemed a wonderful bounty for the country as a whole, it created problems in the areas it targeted. Communities across the United States and especially in the Gun Belt had come to see military spending as a permanent basis for their economy. Base closings posed an enormous threat to them and they rallied forces to stop the closures. Efforts to prevent base closures had an effective track record. Even though the Pentagon had loudly advocated base closures throughout the 1970s and 1980s, no domestic military bases closed between 1976 and 1988.[432] Closure meant disruption and communities could be expected to fight against it with every bit of influence they possessed.

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[429] Ann Markusen, Peter Hall, Scott Campbell, and Sabina Deitrick, *The Rise of the GunBelt: The Military ReMapping of Industrial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Ann Markusen and Joel Yudken, *Dismantling the Cold War Economy* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); David Beers, *Blue Sky Dream: A Memoir of America's Fall from Grace* (New York: Doubleday, 1996).

[430] Lisa Benton, *The Presidio: From Army Post to National Park* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 73-75.

[431] Elizabeth Powell and Pat Towell, "Cheney Reveals New Hit List; Members Feel the Pain," *Congressional Quarterly* April 13, 1991, 13.

[432] Benton, *The Presidio*, 78; Roger Lotchin, *Fortress California, 1910-1961: From Warfare to Welfare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 224-27.

In a time of extraordinary federal budget deficits and the need to show the American public the fruits of victory in the Cold War in some demonstrable fashion, the peace dividend assured changes in spending priorities. Especially during the aftermath of the savings and loan scandal, caused by deregulation of lending during the Reagan administration and leading to a more than $300 billion bailout, cries to cut federal expenditures grew louder and louder. The military long enjoyed federal largesse and it seemed only fitting that public benefit from the end of the Soviet threat come from the Pentagon's budget. The Defense Base Realignment and Closure Act in 1988 designated 500 military installations and directed the Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC) to determine which ones should be closed. An all-or-nothing clause in the legislation curtailed the kinds of local lobbying that had been used to be keep bases open in the past. At the end of 1988, BRAC offered eighty-six bases for closure, five for partial closure, and fifty-four to be diminished in size and funding. The commission estimated the annual savings in expenditures would reach nearly $700 million; the total savings over twenty years was expected to approach $6 billion. The Presidio's declining military significance put it high on the list to be closed.[433]

The Presidio's vulnerability stemmed from the Army's changing needs. By the late 1980s, the military could no longer defend its use of large sections of property that did not include the space to engage in training and other combat-readiness endeavors. With nearly 1,500 prime urban acres, the Presidio seemed an excellent candidate for other uses. The aging post was not sufficiently large to meet any of the needs of modern military practice, lacking the storage capabilities, the space, and airport facilities that supported Army missions in the post-Cold War military. Nor could the post provide adequate training space for modern warfare. Despite its important location, spectacular scenery, and historical position as the point of departure for Pacific activities, in the post-Cold War world, the Presidio was an expensive anachronism.

Of the bases slated for closure, the Presidio was unique. Its predesignated status as part of a national park meant that while the economic impact of the closure remained large, the community in which the Presidio stood was caught between its desire for park space and its economic health. The Bay Area retained a strong regional economy that needed military expenditure, but to a much greater degree than in most other cases of base closure, the military was only one component of the regional economy. By the end of the 1980s, San Francisco had reinvented itself as a convention and tourism destination, as well as a regional and Pacific Rim financial center. Nearby, the economic engine of the future, Silicon Valley, gathered momentum. The military was important, but unlike circumstances in other communities, it alone did not drive the economy and even the closure of other bases did not portend economic doom the Bay Area. The region's political culture also mitigated against public outcry at the loss of the base. The home of the Free Speech Movement, much of the anti-Vietnam War movement, and Haight-Ashbury, the Bay Area helped invent the American culture of freedom, the post-1960s definition of liberty as the individual's right to do as he or she pleased.[434] It could absorb the loss of military dollars with less difficulty than many other places and reinvent the space for new uses. Once Congress confirmed the closure, the transfer of the Presidio from post to park began. The

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[433] Benton, *The Presidio*, 81.

[434] Chester Hartman, *The Transformation of San Francisco* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld, 1984), 293-326; Richard E. DeLeon, *Left Coast City: Progressive Politics in San Francisco, 1975-1991* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 98-133.

Department of Defense envisioned a five-year transition period, with the Army leaving by the end of 1994. The question of what the Presidio would become loomed large in the Bay Area and no shortage of claimants for the space came forward after the decision to close the post.

The proposals took many forms and represented many points of view. The Bay Area seemed engaged in a contest, with the goal to find an appropriate use for the Presidio, leading to a variety of unsolicited proposals. The *San Francisco Chronicle* ran a four-page spread entitled "The All-New Presidio: 1001 Ideas On What To Do With It Now." The *San Francisco Independent* trumpeted "Help Shape the Presidio." Even Mikhail Gorbachev weighed in, calling the Presidio the ideal place for the headquarters of the U.S. chapter of his Gorbachev Foundation. Robert Corrigan, president of San Francisco State University, envisioned "an Education Park;" Kevin Starr, California state historian, saw "a prophetic place, where the future is evoked and struggled for in ways at once symbolic and practical." Others envisioned a space that could provide solutions to urban ills; one such proposal sought an AIDS hospice, another, a homeless shelter, and a third, a recovery center for drug addicts. Visions of the Presidio as one large space or broken up into many small ones competed. As the proposals streamed in, William Penn Mott, a longtime resident of the Bay Area who once headed the California state parks system and who stepped down from the National Park Service's director's post in April 1989, encapsulated the issue. The Presidio was "a global resource," Mott intoned. "Where is the vision that will stir our blood?"[435]

The energized public embraced the idea of the transfer. To many in the Bay Area, the Presidio seemed an ideal of public space in an age when publicly oriented programs and the values they embodied fought against the spreading concept that private entities functioned better than public services. To the public, the question focused not on park status, but on the nature of the park. The Presidio was difficult to define as space. It was certainly much more than any of its components and it appeared different from any other military site in the park system. The Presidio shared only historic fabric with restored posts such as Kansas' Fort Scott National Historic Site, the federal armory at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, and other military-oriented national parks. It had so many other dimensions that similar parks did not, and its location in a major urban area also meant that the Presidio had a powerful local constituency apart from those who loved historic preservation and military architecture and history. Military structures did not completely define the space; natural habitat, earlier history, and urban recreational space offered other themes for exploration. Even with the bold ideas advanced at the earliest planning stages, the final disposition remained entirely open to debate. No idea yet captured everyone's imagination. As 1990 began, Mott was correct. No one had come forward with an idea worthy of the magnificent space in the shadow of the Golden Gate Bridge.

The transfer also upset the balance of power in Bay Area politics. For most of the post-1945 era, the military had been a given, something that the community and its congressional representatives could depend on as a source of jobs, expenditures, and contracts for the local economy. The decision to close the base altered that reality and recreated the political terrain in the city. There were clear winners and equally distinct losers, those who found that the closing advanced their interests and others who scrambled to redefine the value of the relationships they spent years cultivating. Despite the loss of jobs and contracts, the city of San Francisco framed itself as a winner. Its citizens held a proprietary feeling about the property, and after they became

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[435] Mary G. Murphy, "Fighting Over the Presidio," *The Recorder,* October 27, 1993; Charles McCoy, "Astonishing Views and Many Opinions: Must Be the Presidio," *Wall Street Journal*, April 19, 1994; Bradley Inman, "Presidio Housing Battle," *SFE*, 1993; Benton, *The Presidio*, 88-90.

accustomed to the idea of the closure—itself gut-wrenching for many in the city—they recognized the benefits that could accrue. The Army and Navy had been withdrawing from the Bay Area for years. Golden Gate National Recreation Area in no small part stemmed from this retreat and other bases such as Alameda Naval Air Station also shrunk in size. The city's positive reaction stemmed from its visible need for urban park and recreational space and the limited number of places that the city could secure for such purposes. The Presidio had always been an open post, but public use was restricted by the military presence and also by any restrictions the Army cared to impose. In the aftermath of the departure, the city could count on far better access to more of the Presidio and under the terms of the legislation, a considerable addition to the available parkland in the city. If not a perfect exchange of uses—the city would have liked to keep the dollars that came into its economy from the military—the new circumstances promised something of far greater social value than the old arrangement.[436]

Negative reactions illustrated the convoluted position of a number of California congressional representatives. The Presidio closure meant a loss of jobs and revenue, and to the congressional delegation, these were bread-and-butter issues. Party distinction meant little; political leaders classed as liberals were as likely to oppose closure as those termed conservatives. U.S. Rep. Nancy Pelosi, who represented Phil and Sala Burton's fifth district after their deaths and was closely tied to San Francisco Mayor Art Agnos and his political coalition, objected to the closure because bases in districts that had not been friendly to the military were singled out. U.S. Rep. Barbara Boxer joined her as a leading opponent of closure. Congressional representatives were concerned about future park funding, recognizing that the Presidio received far money as a military post from the Department of Defense budget that it could ever squeeze out of limited NPS appropriations. "We were working pretty hard at the time to ensure that there would be adequate funding for the transition," remembered Craig Middleton, who served on Pelosi's staff at the time and went on to become the first employee of the Presidio Trust. "Clearly when it went from the Department of Defense and that kind of a budget environment to the National Park Service and that kind of budget environment, we were concerned that there wouldn't be enough money to fund the Presidio." They fought for a continued military presence and ultimately secured millions in Defense Department dollars to modernize the Presidio's decrepit infrastructure. Middleton characterized the funds as a gift from the military to the Park Service.[437]

The ploy succeeded, for it generated funds so that the Presidio did not measurably add to the Park Service's multi-billion dollar maintenance backlog and upgraded the Presidio's facilities, but it complicated management as well. The opposition to closure compelled the Park Service to keep its plans for development out of the public eye. The Bay Area congressional delegation made it clear to the Park Service that its main objective was to keep the base open, and Golden Gate National Recreation Area staff recognized clearly the consequences of anything that thwarted the delegation's goals or embarrassed its members in public. "They didn't want us out there trying to lead the community organization to define its future," Superintendent Brian O'Neill remembered. "We lost a year of valuable time in thinking through the transition" to park

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[436] Amy Meyer to Steve Haller, February 20, 2002; Bruce Bellingham and Maggie McCall, "The Presidio: Analysis and Report," *Marina Times*, May 1994; Diana Scott, "Presidio for Sale," *Monitor*, December 28, 1999.

[437] Craig Middleton, interview by Stephen Haller, June 14, 2002; Benton, *The Presidio*, 82, 87; Jacobs, *A Rage for Justice*, 489-94.

status as much of California's congressional delegation tried to reverse BRAC's decision. The Park Service did not even publicly announce the formation of its planning and transition teams, preferring to keep the groups and their members away from the public gaze until the congressional delegation finished its maneuvering. "We didn't send out press releases saying we were organizing," O'Neill remembered.[438] The park had learned its lessons of local politics well, avoiding any hint of discord as Pelosi and Boxer attempted to diminish the impact of the closure.

Even the desire of the California congressional delegation could not stop the closure, and the Park Service faced an enormous responsibility. The transfer taxed the agency. Administering the Presidio put the Park Service in a new realm, one that took it further from its roots as an agency that managed heritage and nature. The Park Service had little experience with projects of this size and scope; few organizations and fewer government agencies did. Nor could the agency muster the resources to support such a large project. Nearly eviscerated during the Reagan years, the Park Service had only begun to rebound.

The agency was also handicapped by a relative lack of experience with, and the fairly recent nature of, its urban planning efforts. Most Park Service development had historically occurred in remote parks in situations where the agency retained great power in the region, and a consensus had not been reached about the lessons that the few recently established national recreation area offered. Indeed, in the mid-1970s, when the recent wave of national recreation areas came into being, the Park Service faced challenges to its discretion on a number of fronts.

In the decade since George Hartzog, Jr. installed the tripartite management structure that defined each park as natural, historic, or recreational, and arrangement for management in accordance with such values, the Park Service lost considerable autonomy. New federal legislation and a changing cultural climate hamstrung the agency. NEPA, the Endangered Species Act and other pieces of environmental legislation curtailed agency management prerogative, compelling the Park Service to document and defend its actions while proscribing specific patterns of management. The Park Service had counted on its friends in the public since the days of Stephen T. Mather, but the cultural revolution of the late 1960s created and empowered a more critical public. Private citizens and even organizations such as the National Parks and Conservation Association increasingly criticized agency policy and opposed decisions. Dependent on its public, the Park Service needed to re-evaluate its policies and practices.[439]

Even as the agency undertook such measures, the very nature of what constituted a national park was changing. Until the 1960s, national park areas had generally been created through a cooperative process between the Department of the Interior, the Park Service, Congress, and in the case of national monuments, the president. By the mid-1970s, Congressman Phil Burton, the founder of Golden Gate National Recreation Area, had become a power in Congress. One of his primary tools to persuade recalcitrant opponents to vote with him was to give them a little of what politicians call "pork," projects that brought federal revenue to their districts. Burton became the master of what came to be known as "parkbarreling," the process of obviating opposition by proposing a national park area in the opponent's district. In two major bills, the first of which passed in 1978, Burton dramatically increased the number of units in the

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[438] Brian O'Neill, interview by Sara Conklin, unedited transcript May 19, 1999, Presidio Oral History project, 3, 5.

[439] Barry Mackintosh, *The National Parks: Shaping the System* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1991), 89; Foresta, *America's National Parks and Their Keepers*, 68-80; Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?*, 58-63.

park system almost entirely without consulting the agency.[440] As a result, the Park Service managed a broader and more diverse mandate, making existing regulations increasingly archaic.

At the same time, the Park Service remained ambivalent about recreation, but increasingly found it thrust upon the agency. The agency ultimately emerged victorious from its battle with the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in the 1960s, but in winning, made itself the federal agency in charge of recreation by default. This triumph yielded a problem: having claimed recreation as its turf and successfully battled to prove it, the agency had to do something with it. Recreation had been an afterthought since the creation of Boulder Dam Recreation Area, now Lake Mead National Recreation Area, in 1936, and as late as 1970, remained peripheral to main currents of agency policy. As the nation grappled with urban uprisings, empowered constituencies, and as the need for outdoor space of all kinds became dire, recreation finally demanded the agency's full attention.

This combination of factors made the tripartite management that George Hartzog embraced obsolete. The Park Service had lost much of its power with its supporters and a great deal of its cachet. It needed to prove its worth to its old friends, make new ones, and maintain its relationships with Congress. Even though Burton failed in a bid for majority leader of the U.S. House by one vote, he remained a powerful advocate of urban, historical, and other kinds of parks. The Park Service recognized that faux wilderness parks were more a part of its past than its future. Burton created dozens of small historical parks, the agency embraced the urban mission at the core of the "parks to the people, where the people are" ethos, and soon, the agency found itself with a large recreational component among its parks. Policy had to respond, and the codification of the three management books into one, in which all park areas were governed by the same doctrine, followed. The agency maintained flexibility by allowing management by zone within parks, so that areas that had obvious primary values could be managed in accordance with those features.

At Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the new mandate contributed to a change in the park's management philosophy. Despite its many natural attributes, Golden Gate had been managed as recreational and visitor space throughout the 1970s. The new directives demanded more comprehensive management of the park, much more attention to resource management, and far greater cognizance of the difference between various areas of the park. Master-planning at Golden Gate quickly reflected the decentralized management by zone at the core of the new program. The park was spread out and diverse and no Park Service policy better suited it than the ability to divide the park into discrete areas and manage accordingly. The new program simultaneously increased the importance of Golden Gate National Recreation Area as a model in the park system and helped create a management structure that reflected the park's needs. The end to the isolation of the recreational category helped prepare the park for its role as a premier urban national park area.

Yet at the Presidio, the Park Service was merely one stakeholder, one of many claimants except that it held the land. No wonder Superintendent Brian O'Neill felt "both excitement and a sinking feeling in my own stomach" when he heard the news of the transfer. "We knew that we were going to be working under a magnifying glass," he remembered.[441]

Developing a new relationship with the Army was paramount. Existing relationships from Whalen's era persisted, but the Presidio demanded new emphasis. The transfer could go

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[440] Jacobs, *A Rage for Justice*, 363-79.

[441] O'Neill interview, May 19, 1999, 2.

easily or badly, and the process depended on how the two agencies regarded each other and whether they could reach accommodation. The two agencies had very different cultures and both sides had to learn better how the other operated in order to achieve the best results. In one early encounter, Superintendent O'Neill requested a meeting with Lieutenant General William Harrison, commander of the Sixth Army. When asked its subject, O'Neill replied that it would cover general issues. Army protocol required more detail. Military officials were accustomed to being informed of the topics to be discussed so that they could be prepared. Park Service representatives soon found that if they wore their Class As, the standard Park Service dress uniform, they received a better response from military officers than if they wore civilian business clothing. Mike Savage, head of the Park Service's transition team, displayed a cool professionalism that helped the process. With some protocol training by the Army Public Affairs office for park personnel, the Park Service and the Army were able to develop a solid working relationship.[442]

The development of that relationship was immeasurably assisted when Park Service staff decided to join the periodic Friday afternoon runs that the army held. At these events, the entire base showed up on the parade ground, organized in companies, each with its own uniform, with colors on their guidon. The company that finished first in the previous event led off on a four-mile tour of the Presidio. When the Park Service first joined in, it lacked sufficient numbers to form an entire company, but the military allowed the Park Service runners to line up about two-thirds of the way back. Although the park runners lacked military precision and did not flow orders well, they learned quickly, assisted by a number of staff with prior military experience. In time, the Park Service runners came up with a guidon of their own as well as shirts and shorts to make their own uniform. "We then enjoyed the run," remembered Rich Bartke, "but it was obvious we were still stepchildren."[443]

Belonging in this setting required bolder measures. Early on, Bartke noticed that once during each run, a "hot shot soldier" would grab the company's guidon and then run entirely around the battalion and back to his place as the battalion continued to run. This was a powerful feat, for the soldier had to circumvent the entire battalion, progressing faster than the group as he moved in same direction as the battalion. Bartke decided to try it; when he succeeded, the soldiers cheered, not him, but the Park Service. From then on, at least one and sometimes two or three Park Service runners accomplished the encirclement. The Park Service was the first to have female runners succeed at this task. As a result, the Park Service people earned the soldiers' respect. They became more friendly and more responsive to both questions and suggestions. "The ice," Bartke remembered, "had definitely melted."[444]

The military remained ambivalent about the transfer. From one perspective, it ceded a place of importance and history and for some of its leaders, relinquishing control was difficult. Yet the Presidio had become an expensive headache, the terms of its management changed greatly by Phil Burton's "one-up, one-down" rule and especially by the cessation of construction on the post office in 1986. The Army experienced a level of scrutiny to which it was unaccustomed, as newspapers and magazines trumpeted accounts of its management practices. *National Parks,* the National Parks and Conservation Association's magazine, took an aggressive stance that caught the Army unawares. NPCA charged that the Army failed to adequately assess

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[442] O'Neill interview, May 19, 1999, 9-11; Middleton interview, June 14, 2002.

[443] Bartke to Haller, March 5, 2002.

[444] Ibid.

the condition of the Presidio and provide steps to mitigate its issues in a draft environmental impact statement on the transfer. Accustomed to proceeding without watchdogs, the Army found life in the court of public opinion uncomfortable. Although notable exceptions, such as Lieutenant General Glynn C. Mallory, Harrison's successor, had difficulty accepting civilian control of the Presidio, many in the command structure recognized that greater public scrutiny highlighted the administrative strengths of other agencies. The Park Service worked to be sensitive to the concerns of military personnel who found their lives transformed by the decision to close the Presidio.[445] The transition began as smoothly as could a reversal of roles of such proportion.

The timeline for the military's departure was very short. In retrospect, some NPS officials wished they been given fifteen years to plan the transition, but five was all they received. "I always felt that because the timeline for the Army's departure was so precipitous, we should really simplify our planning for the Presidio," recalled Doug Nadeau, chief of Resource Management at Golden Gate National Recreation Area at the time. Nadeau advocated concentrating on the structures, the more than 500 buildings that contributed to the national historic landmark designation, and deferring natural resource issues such as forest management. Instead the agency opted for a more conventional approach, "by the book," Nadeau described it, that placed heavy demands on park staff and on the planning process and contributed to the growing distance between the Presidio and the rest of the park.[446]

To meet the challenges of the Presidio, the Park Service utilized its friends and established the kind of relationships for the Presidio that had been successful at Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The Park Service needed influential friends if it was to affect Congress and the Department of Defense as they appropriated funds for the Presidio; even local uproar was not sufficient. The park's cooperating association, the Golden Gate National Park Association, entered the process. At the request of the Park Service, GGNPA developed a concept for the Presidio Council as a way to bring volunteers into the planning process. The park Service wanted "to pull together some of the greatest minds in the country in an advisory role," Criag Middleton remembered, "to try to get some ideas about not only what should the vision be for this place." In the Bay Area, this was a tried and true strategy that created a proprietary feeling about the resource in question. As a solution to the management of the Presidio, GGNPA offered the CAC, the single most successful community advisory board in the park system, as the organizational model. GGNPA envisioned the Presidio Council along similar lines, an entity that could bring the benefit of professionals in various areas as well as a national context to Presidio deliberations, but the council was never intended to be a public body like the CAC. "It simply wasn't going to happen," O'Neill recalled, "unless we had a very strong voice from a national constituency." There were few more high-powered entities than the Presidio Council. Included among the earliest members was James Harvey, chairman of the board of the Transamerica Corporation, a charismatic leader who accepted the chair of the council. John Bryson, CEO of Southern California Edison, Richard Clarke, CEO of Pacific Gas & Electric, headed a diverse group of civic leaders, business professionals, conservation professionals such as John C.

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[445] Gerald D. Adams, "New Presidio Money Woes," *SFE*, April 10, 1991; John R. Moses, "Presidio's Uncertain Future, *SFI*, April 6, 1991; O'Neill interview, May 19, 1999; "NPS May Inherit Army's Problems at Presidio," *National Parks*, March/April 1991.

[446] Doug Nadeau, interview by John Martini, October 6, 1998, Presidio Oral History Project, 62-64.

Sawhill of the Nature Conservancy and even movie directors, such as Francis Ford Coppola, on the Presidio Council. Architect Maya Lin, known for her design of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC, also was a member of the group. A real synergy developed among the group, and many remembered their discussions as fruitful and enlightening.[447]

The Presidio Council soon included an array of powerful and influential people who donated their time to help create a Presidio plan and raise funds to implement it. The council and GGNPA together raised almost $1 million and received a similar sum in donated time and services to conduct economic analysis. GGNPA used part of the money to hire professional staff to assist the council, to commission consulting projects to further the planning effort, and to create and disseminate newsletters, promotional brochures, and other communications material. Comprised of powerful and influential individuals, the council could not help appearing as if it favored privatization. "I never felt that the Council overstepped its bounds," O'Neill observed as a counterpoint. At the same time, the Citizens' Advisory Commission was enlisted to support the planning effort.[448] The assembled influence, experience, and resources seemed perfect for the task of redefining the Presidio as a national park.

Planning the Presidio was a Park Service endeavor, too large a task for the staff at Golden Gate National Recreation Area alone. Both the regional office and the Denver Service Center, one of the Park Service's specialized support units, vied for control of the process, and in the end, the agency assembled two teams to assist in the process. The General Management Plan Amendment (GMPA) Planning Team reported to the Denver Service Center and was charged with creating an amendment to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area GMP for the Presidio. The Management Transition Team reported to the park and planned for the actual transfer of the Presidio. From the Denver Service Center and duty-stationed at Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the seven-person core team was headed by Roger Kelly Brown, who was succeeded by Don Neubacher, both longtime NPS veterans. Both had experience with complicated projects. Differences in management style led to Neubacher's succession; advocates such as Amy Meyer thought Brown was "in over his head." Nuebacher experienced considerably more success; he was "really smart," Craig Middleton remembered. "I was amazed at how they could pull together an extraordinary amount of workshops and an extraordinary amount of public comment into something that turned into a plan." The complete twenty-person planning team included experts in historic preservation, landscape architecture, park planning, law, finance, and community development from all over the Park Service and consulted park staff on numerous occasions. The Park Service financed a position for a San Francisco city planner to serve on the team, adding valuable urban input.[449]

Neubacher brought two decades of Park Service experience when he succeeded Roger Kelly Brown. As Chief of Interpretation at Point Reyes National Seashore from 1985 to 1992 and with a background in planning, Neubacher was close to the area and its issues. Regional Director Stanley Albright asked Neubacher to step into what everyone knew was a tough

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[447] Middleton interview, June 14, 2002; Benton, *The Presidio*, 91; O'Neill interview, May 19, 1999, 14.

[448] Benton, *The Presidio*, 92; O'Neill interview, May 19, 1999, 15-17.

[449] Middleton interview, June 14, 2002; Amy Meyer to Steve Haller, February 20, 2002; John Reynolds, interview by Sara Conklin, unedited draft transcript, May 18, 1999, Presidio Oral History Project, 3-5; Benton, *The Presidio*, 92-93.

assignment.[450] Creating a master plan in the form of an amendment to the GMP required the same kind of comprehensive participation as did every similar endeavor at Golden Gate National Recreation Area. In the case of the Presidio, the stakes were much higher.

Golden Gate National Recreation Area understood the need for public involvement and one of best features of the park was its ability to let the public weigh in on its proposals. The team followed the park's long-standing pattern of outreach, utilizing frequent public meetings and workshops as way to assure that the agency received the community's input and to allay any fears that a group might be excluded from the process. The public was enthused and participated in myriad ways. The disposition of the Presidio clearly was crucial to the local's public sense of well-being in their city. At one public forum at Marina Middle School, 400 people sat in the audience. The typical array of Bay Area organizations appeared; neighborhood groups, community organizations, grassroots environmental groups, and other similar entities voiced their strong and distinct perspectives. Despite these inputs, a cohesive vision continued to elude planners, and as an answer, the Park Service and San Francisco State University sponsored a two-day "Think Big" conference in November 1989. Presidio "Visions" workshops followed, and by the spring of 1990, an open participatory process had been established.[451]

The planning process yielded the Presidio Planning Guidelines, introduced to the public in May 1990. Its ten principles affirmed the historic fabric, natural features, and visual integrity of the Presidio, articulated a commitment to national park values and to maintaining open space in the former post, promised the clean-up of hazardous waste, long-term thinking to underpin planning, and ample public input. They also allowed the agency to dispense with some of the more bizarre public proposals, the sometimes loopy expressions of faith and whimsy that cropped up in an entirely open process. After eighteen years in the Bay Area, the Park Service had learned its lessons well. Everyone, however ephemeral, had to have their say, and the Park Service listened. The only downside of the wide-open process was the cost in time. Fringe ideas, largely irrelevant but that did comply with federal laws and regulations, extended the process, but in the end, the conscious effort to assure widespread involvement kept interested groups in the process and prevented opponents from thwarting the complicated plans.

The planning guidelines completed the initial phase of creating a vision for the old post, the first step in a Presidio master plan. This took place between 1989, when the closure was announced, and the end of the public input process in 1991. Media attention and countless hearings defined the phase, and two separate publications, suggesting different perspectives, reflected a number of points of view. *Reveille,* the planning team's newsletter and *Presidio Update,* a newsletter from GGNPA, both described the process to the public. By the time the planning guidelines were announced, the Park Service could affirm with certainty that no agency endeavor had ever been so carefully and publicly scrutinized.

The transition from ideas to plans revealed the complicated synergy of integrating the public, the Presidio Council, the Park Service, and the Army in the planning process. The planning team led the way, with support from GGNPA and the Presidio Council. They distributed a "Presidio Visions Kit" to the public, held Visions workshops in a town meeting format in 1990 and early 1991, in June 1991, organized a trade show called the Presidio Forum to publicize ideas, and encouraged proposals. The release of the Presidio Concepts Workbook in

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[450] Don Neubacher, interview by Sara Conklin, April 27, 1999, Presidio Oral History Project, unedited draft, 1-7.

[451] Duvel White, "GGNRA Asks Citizens to Envision Future of Presidio," *Star Presidian,* January 31, 1991; Benton, *The Presidio,* 93.

December 1991, full of sample plans, reiterated the park's commitment to include a wide range of activities. The process moved forward. In November 1991, James Harvey, leader of the Presidio Council, observed that the council's task seemed to be about halfway complete. It was a "turning point," Harvey told the council, "concluding our advice on visions and moving on to identification and analysis of future uses." Primary among these objectives was finding tenants who could pay for the combination of physical improvement and the interpretation and other park programs essential to converting the Presidio into a national park.[452]

As Harvey's memo indicated, from the end of the idea phase, conversion of the Presidio simultaneously proceeded on a series of different levels. In April 1992, the Park Service distributed "Calls for Interest" for prospective tenants and received more than 400 responses. As the agency sifted through the proposals, Neubacher's team tried to create focus from the diverse collection of ideas. Some tension between the planning team and the council ensued. Different kinds of objectives and timelines contributed. "I don't think at time we felt they were very supportive," Neubacher recalled. "I think they wanted a plan to really move a lot faster."[453] The Presidio Council assumed the obligation to secure "practical revenue sources" to support implementation of the visions. The council's focus shifted to identifying prospective tenants and future sources of revenue. The planning process included a practical dimension from the outset, the ongoing need for financing to support the range of uses. Even as the planning team held a design workshop for the Presidio in June 1992 and continued to hold public hearings throughout 1992, questions of finances loomed large.[454]

Finding the means to pay the enormous bills that the plan would generate was essential. As a range of groups sought to acquire Presidio space, the Park Service, the Presidio Council, and GGNPA recognized that unless someone took initiative, financial resources were likely to be too scarce to accomplish most objectives. Without any conception of Congress' actions, an enormous effort to discern a practical basis for measuring the economic value of the Presidio took shape. Commissioned by GGNPA, Glenn Isaacson and Associates undertook a preliminary financial analysis that assessed the market value of medical and research facilities and housing, and the viability of converting existing conference centers to revenue-generating use. The report also offered an analysis of maintenance and operations costs for the Presidio. This analysis laid the basis for eventual Presidio Building Leasing and Financing Implementation Strategy, one of the supplements to the eventual Presidio plan.[455] Clearly the planning of the Presidio would proceed on more than one track.

The planning process encouraged a combination of vision and pragmatism. A draft plan was circulated internally beginning in March 1993, followed by a draft plan amendment released to the public for review. Hearings followed, the revision process began, and finally in October

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[452] Jim Harvey to Presidio Council, November 6, 1991, OCPA, Box 5, Presidio Council (Information mailed out by GGNRA).

[453] Neubacher interview, April 27, 1999, 10.

[454] Harvey to Presidio Council, November 6, 1991; Neubacher interview, April 29, 1999, 11-12; Benton, *The Presidio*, 98-100.

[455] Glenn Isaacson and Associates, " Summary of Baseline Financial Study," in Harvey to Presidio Council, November 6, 1991; Keyser Marston & Associates, *Presidio Building Leasing and Financing Implementation Strategy: A Supplement to Final General Management Plan Amendment, Presidio of San Francisco, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, California, July 1994* (San Francisco: Golden Gate National Recreation Area, 1994).

1993, the grand vision for the Presidio was released in draft form, along with supplemental studies. "It's hard to get a vision of a place down into one page," Middleton remembered with a laugh, but "they ultimately did." With the debut of the draft plan, the council and the planning team found common ground. James Harvey, chair of the Presidio Council, telephoned Neubacher to congratulate him on the contents. The draft plan contained the kind of global vision that everyone sought for the Presidio, envisioning it as a linchpin in the park and a conduit for a vision of a sustainable future. "He was pretty happy with the report," Neubacher remembered, and the satisfied response to the plan helped clearly define different and complementary obligations. The Final General Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement was approved in July 1994. The Presidio would become a "great urban national park" and a "model for sustainability" under the plan.[456] Divided into thirteen planning units, the Presidio became a series of areas drawn together by shared overarching management but likely to pursue independent destinies. They were established from existing patterns of use, topography, vistas, and public input and they subdivided the Presidio into more manageable units from NPS perspective. At its most basic level, the plan seemed to replicate the grassroots structure of Golden Gate National Recreation Area at the Presidio. The hard won lessons of the Bay Area yielded dividends.

The plan also showed the tension the Park Service felt over its ability to maintain administrative control of the Presidio. The project was of a scope so much greater than the agency had ever encountered that day-to-day administration of the planning process remained with the agency's Washington office. Park superintendent Brian O'Neill was characteristically philosophic about the circumstances. "It was becoming more and more apparent that a large number of very important decisions needed to be made at the highest levels of the Administration and Congress," he told an interviewer. "The future of the Presidio was going to be dependent on the ability to execute that sort of high level engagement."[457] The master plan revealed this tension, as well as the Park Service's desire to maintain control.

By the time the plan was unveiled, the Army's departure from the Presidio had already begun. In March 1993, the Army turned the Presidio Forest, Lobos Creek Valley, and Coastal Bluffs, the last managed by the park since the 1970s, over to the Park Service. In September 1993, the transfer continued. The Park Service assumed complete administration of Crissy Field, long divided by a fence down the center to differentiate the park's area from the Army's, the Army Museum, and cavalry stables.[458] The departure of the Army added urgency to the planning process and made the transfer seem real. Until the Army began to leave parts of the post, the entire project sometimes seemed to the Park Service a hypothetical exercise in planning.

With the grand vision released to the public, the Park Service eagerly awaited responses. The debut began inauspiciously when two days ahead of the official release the *San Francisco Chronicle* featured a two-page story about the plan. Neither the mayor of San Francisco nor the city supervisors had seen the plan before the story appeared, creating a public relations problem for the Park Service. After this gaffe was smoothed over, the public response generally favored

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[456] Middleton interview, June 14, 2002; "Creating a Park for the 21st Century: From Military Post to National Park," *Final General Management Plan Amendment, Presidio of San Francisco* (Denver: Denver Service Center, National Park Service: 1994), 2-6; Neubacher interview, April 27, 1999, 11-13.

[457] O'Neill interview, May 19, 1999.

[458] Dick Brill, "Cradle of Aviation Fenced Down Middle," *SFP*, October 14, 1977; Benton, *The Presidio,* 106-110.

the plan. Bay Area politicians such as U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, who won a seat in the upper house in the 1992 election, and Rep. Nancy Pelosi, recognized that over time, the plan returned to the Bay Area much of economic benefit that closing of the post had cost it. It also offered new avenues of constituency building, and most of the remainder of the California delegation lined up behind the plan. San Francisco Mayor Frank Jordan got over his shock at the early release to announce that the city would "stand firmly behind the proposal." Even vocal critics of the private-public dimensions of the transformation of the Presidio supported the plan.[459] Despite criticism of some of the plan's features, no lawsuits against the plan ensued, itself a triumph. The Muwekma Ohlone raised concerns over what they regarded as the disposition of Indian land and a fringe publication, the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, questioned the transfer of electric power service to Pacific Gas & Electric, but in the larger scope of potential objections, these were relatively small concerns.

Only the Army raised loud objections. Following BRAC's decision to keep 400 military soldier and civilian employees at the Presidio after the transfer, the Army sought to reassert some forms of administrative control. The plan left out military needs, an Army communiqué asserted, failing to ensure amenities that guaranteed quality of life for remaining soldiers and their families. Housing remained a primary military concern. More than 600 units were slated for demolition in the plan, and the Army believed there would not be enough space to house its personnel. Presidio interim General Manager, and former state park director, Russell Cahill believed the issue could be easily resolved, but in the meantime, the Army used the issue to express some of its frustration over the transfer.[460]

At about the same time as the draft debuted, the reality of managing the Presidio became an issue. The two planning teams competed with one another and by 1992, the relations between the two teams had become tense and counterproductive. The plan hinged on forging partnerships, securing investment capital, a full-blown leasing program, and philanthropic support. Factionalism within the Park Service working groups did not help further these goals, and at the behest of Jim Harvey and the Presidio Council as well as GGNPA, McKinsey and Company, one of the most significant management consulting firms in the country, developed the outlines of a system of joint management. McKinsey proposed implementing a public benefit corporation or a public-private partnership that would let the Park Service do what it did best—resource management, interpretation, planning—and provide specialists for the more technical economic dimensions of running the Presidio. McKinsey concluded that the arrangement could save as much as thirty percent of the cost of management. It was a merger of "economic reality with park stewardship."[461]

The Presidio Project Office, established in 1993, resulted. Headed initially by Robert Chandler, who had been superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park, and reporting directly to the Washington, D.C. office of the Park Service, the project office completed the GMPA, handled the transition from the Army and initiated leasing of properties on the old post. "I realized the Presidio was going to be all-consuming for some period of time," Chandler recalled,

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[459] Gerald D. Adams, "Vast U.S. Plan for Presidio," *SFC*, October 14, 1993; Carl Nolte, "Big Worries about Plan for Presidio," *SFC*, October 15, 1993.

[460] Gerald D. Adams, "6th Army Criticizes New Plan for Presidio," *SFE*, October 21, 1993.

[461] Benton, *The Presidio*, 121; Nicholas Lemann, "The Kids in the Conference Room: How McKinsey & Company Became the Next Big Step," *The New Yorker,* October 18 & 25, 1999, 209-216.

"and so we just acknowledged the fact that it was going to be kind of a tough row for a while." Chandler and his wife were the first civilians to move onto the post and they confronted the rigid social structure of the military. Chandler's office was the first nonmilitary related entity to open on the post and it became the conduit for park management. In his three and one-half years, Chandler addressed the implications of a Congress hostile to the Presidio as a park, the demise of the Presidio Council, which stepped aside as he arrived, and the gradual dilution of Presidio legislation. Most difficult was the transition from conventional park status to self-sustaining free market entity. "It was a question of the economic imperatives as opposed to the programmatic goals that the Plan outlined," Chandler recalled, "and how that balance could be achieved."[462] Only after December 31, 1999 did the lines of authority shift with the dissolution of the Presidio Project Office, after which the project reported to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area superintendent.

Weakened, the Park Service could not muster the support to retain greater control of the Presidio. During the early 1990s, the agency continued to flounder, whipped between an essentially supportive but ineffectual Democratic Congress and vituperative minority buoyed by loud outcries from the Wise Use movement and others who regarded national parks as a threat to private property. The agency seemed weak, and while Director James Ridenour could reflect that "the negative attitude toward the Park Service gradually improved over the four years" he served, his optimism took longer to reach the park level. [463]

Political concerns also hampered the transfer of the Presidio. As the 1994 congressional session ended, Presidio advocates found themselves stymied by the California Desert Protection Act. The Park Service had invested more than a decade in trying to protect the Mojave desert and when the chance finally came to pass the bill, it took priority over the Presidio project. CDPA passed just prior to the 1994 election, on October 31, 1994. Presidio advocates were told that Congress could not pass two California park bills so close together in time, and the Presidio would have to wait to the next session.[464] To politicians in Washington, D.C., the Presidio seemed somehow less urgent than the long-standing battle in the desert.

The election of the "Contract with America" Republican majority-Congress in the 1994 changed the calculus of the situation. Anti-government at its core, this self-styled "New Right" sought to reform government by eliminating its functions. The Presidio came into focus for some of these reformers, and one, Rep. John Duncan, of Tennessee, proposed selling the Presidio. Although Rep. Nancy Pelosi blunted this objective, the very proposal suggested that Presidio advocates operated in a decidedly different environment. Without the support of the now-wobbly bipartisan conservation coalition in Congress and absent a Democratic majority, the Presidio became part of larger discussions about the role of government in American society.[465]

The Park Service's position had become tenuous. Morale remained low and the talk of government reorganization that began with the election of Bill Clinton did little to improve the climate. The pressure for some kind of paying proposition at the Presidio grew, and the Park Service lost control of the process. Even the Park Service's friends and partners criticized the agency in public forums. In one instance, the Park Service was undermined by criticism from the

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[462] Robert Chandler, interview by Sara Conklin, May 14, 1999, 1-14, Presidio Oral History Project.

[463] Ridenour, *The National Parks Compromised*, 210; Bartke to Haller, March 5, 2002; Meyer interview, February 25, 2002, 23.

[464] Meyer interview, February 25, 2002; Eric Nystrom, "Mojave National Preserve: Draft Administrative History," June 10, 2002, 13-30.

[465] Meyer interview, February 25, 2002; Benson, *The Presidio*, 128-35.

Presidio Council in front of Rep. Nancy Pelosi. Some agency officials believed that the exchange damaged the quest for Park Service management of the Presidio. Without support, the agency could not resist pay-as-you-go proposals, much to the dismay of long-time supporters such as Rich Bartke and Amy Meyer. "It was evident," Meyer remembered, "that Congress bi-partisanly did not intend to continue to pay and would not pay a huge amount in perpetuity for the Presidio . . . we got a very onerous bill and had to live with it." "Financial self-sufficiency, although it was considered pretty Draconian, galvanized a lot of support around the bill," Middleton remembered. "And it wasn't only Republican support. It was bipartisan support. The bill passed by an extraordinary margin."[466]

The "Presidio Trust" stemmed from the process of creating partners. The Presidio Council was the first step. As Congress set out to finally define the Presidio management structure, it sought to give such an entity legislative sanction. The initial bill to establish the partnership called the entity the "Presidio Corporation," but the Presidio Council advocated a name that connoted the public nature and responsibility of the entity and Presidio Trust was selected instead. "One of the pivotal things was when we came up with the idea of this public benefit corporation," Craig Middleton recalled. "As people started to understand that through this kind of set-up, we might be able to actually do this thing without causing the taxpayer too much pain, it started to win acceptance." Despite the attempt to craft a way to protect the Presidio, criticism in the community followed almost immediately. Loud if scarce voices insisted that the legislation created an entity that served business needs ahead of the larger community. Some labeled the proposed entity "Presidio Inc.," charging that the Presidio would become a business park free of San Francisco's stringent zoning restrictions and other regulations, a tax-free corporation running a redevelopment agency under the guise of a national park that would not be bound by open meeting statutes or state and local environmental laws.[467]

The January 1994 revelation of an almost clandestine arrangement between Pacific Gas & Electric and the Park Service offered powerful proof of suspicions about the idea of a public-private partnership. Without public hearings or a competitive bidding process, the Park Service planned to pay PG&E $4.43 million to take over the aging electrical system at the Presidio and an additional $5.5 million to bring the system up to standards. PG&E would then operate the system for profit. "This is a tremendous giveaway," Joel Ventresca, president of the Coalition for San Francisco Neighborhoods, observed. "It's a conversion of a government-owned system to a private-owned electrical utility, paid for by the taxpayers." Journalist Martin Espinoza tried to tie the decision, which he framed in the least flattering of terms, to the composition of the Presidio Council, largely comprised of influential business leaders and others from the growth coalition. The Park Service recanted, issued a call for bids for the operation, and PG&E won the bid anyway. [468]

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[466] Middleton interview, June 14, 2002; Bartke to Haller, Feb 5, 2002; Meyer interview, February 25, 2002, 24; Benton, *The Presidio*, 123-25.

[467] Middleton interview, June 14, 2002; Martin Espinoza, "Presidio Inc.," *SFBG*, January 21, 1994; Martin Espinoza, "Presidio Plan Under Fire," *SFBG*, March 9, 1994; Benton, *The Presidio*, 125-27. Espinoza's credibility was often in question. Many believed he wrote what he wanted to, regardless of the facts, and Rich Bartke suggests that Espinoza's lack of credibility diminished his influence on park policy. In the end, Espinoza likely represents an extreme perspective, one that receives a hearing in the Bay Area because of the region's complicated politics. See Bartke to Haller, March 5, 2002.

[468] Martin Espinoza, "The Presidio Power Grab," *SFBG*, January 12, 1994; "The Shame of the Presidio," *SFBG*,

Part investigation and part conspiracy theory, Espinoza's attack asked important questions about the Presidio's future. Although some of his claims were simply outrageous, he did point to an easily overlooked downside of public-private partnerships, that the private side might exercise undue control over the process of transformation. Powerful individuals and corporations evoked fears of exclusivity in planning, creating a de facto image of a park that operated on behalf of the few rather than the many, a direct counter to the role of public open space in the Bay Area and a legitimate threat to the public in an age of privatization. Espinoza's articles hinted strongly in that direction, but the evidence to support such a contention remained obscure. Still, his acerbic attacks compelled reassessment of legislative and agency plans for PG&E even if the eventual result was the same. Later in 1994, open meetings clauses and other similar public access mechanisms were included in the draft legislation.

Congressional opposition to the Presidio transformation also surfaced. At the same time the Park Service readied the grand vision plan, Republican Rep. John Duncan of Tennessee added an amendment to the 1994 Department of the Interior appropriations bill that reduced the Presidio appropriation from $25 million to $14 million. Duncan's attack came on strictly economic grounds; one of his staff members argued that the Park Service "can't afford to run the parks they have now" and under the circumstances, it could not possibly manage new ones. Duncan favored private solutions, selling features of the Presidio to the highest bidder. Advocates of the Presidio transfer were outraged. Newspapers enlisted local support and began letter-writing campaigns, others scrutinized Duncan's record of pork-barreling for his district, and generally, the community united behind the idea of a Presidio park.[469] The question of what kind of park was put aside.

Problems with Congress were not the only obstacle to moving forward. As the sixty-day review period for the draft plan began, the Park Service faced another area of concern, tension with the Army about the mechanics of transition. One estimate suggested that bringing the structures of the Presidio up to building code standards would cost $660 million. At the core remained the question: who would foot the bill? A joint operating budget of $45 million was allocated to finance the transfer. At the outset, the Pentagon funded the majority of the costs of the transfer, but as Army operations diminished, the budget burden shifted to the Park Service. "The Army was trying to transition the Presidio at least cost to the military," Brian O'Neill observed. "The Park Service had everything to gain by trying to maximize the burden of responsibility that was placed on the defense budget....We were at opposite end of the spectrum about the future." Maintenance projects such as sewers, storm drains, and electrical systems came from the military budget, while the Park Service added public safety functions such as police and fire protection to its obligations. The commitment strained the Park Service allocation of $3 million a year for the Presidio between 1990 and 1992, and the community began to worry about the agency's ability to maintain historic structures in the Presidio.[470]

March 30, 1994.

[469] Amy Meyer to Steve Haller, February 20, 2002; Carl Nolte, "Congressman Tries to Block Presidio Plan," *SFC*, March 10, 1994; Gerald D. Adams, "Proposed Presidio Park Too Big, Says Lawmaker," *SFE*, March 10, 1994; "Help Save the Presidio," *MIJ*, March 17, 1994; Carl Nolte, "Congressional Foe of Presidio Knows His Pork," *SFC*, March 11, 1994.

[470] Brian O'Neill interview, May 19, 1999.

The community had been worried about the Army's commitment to maintaining the Presidio since the announcement of possible closure, and Amy Meyer and many others kept pressure on the Army. "We met with Gen. Harrison, and his intention is to leave the Presidio in 'A-1' condition," Reps. Pelosi and Boxer wrote Meyer in 1989. Despite that assurance, the transition offered many opportunities to dispense with expenditures and the public closely watched the military's actions for signs that it intended to fulfill its commitment. In April 1991, more than one hundred people turned out to hear the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers explain the consequences of the environmental impact statement for the closure. The audience inquired about hazardous waste removal, the fate of Letterman Hospital, and other issues associated with making the Presidio ready to transfer. In 1992, the *San Francisco Chronicle* announced that the Pentagon planned to renege on a commitment to spend $10 million on repairs and upgrades to the Presidio's infrastructure. The intervention of Rep. Nancy Pelosi and public pressure forced the Army to follow through on its commitment and by the end of the year, the Army publicly assured the community that it intended to maintain the condition of the Presidio until the day it departed.[471]

Environmental issues loomed over the transfer. Since the enactment of environmental regulations in the United States during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the military typically had been exempt from outside scrutiny. The Cold War and claims of national security allowed the military to avoid public accounting for its environmental impact. After 1986, when President Ronald Reagan signed Executive Order 12580, which permitted the Department of Justice to disapprove any Environmental Protection Agency enforcement action against a federal facility, even the law effectively gutted civilian protection from federal as well as military toxicity. Beginning in 1987, Congress inquired into military mishandling of toxic and threatening substances and the results shocked the public. The discovery of more than 4,500 contaminated sites at 761 military bases around the country began to pierce the veil that shrouded military action.[472]

Scrutiny of military environmental procedures and consequences began as BRAC contemplated the Presidio transfer. Federal law required the military to clean up hazardous waste prior to its departure from the Presidio, and nearly a century of unregulated use of the lands left countless problems. Leaking underground gasoline storage tanks, one of the major civilian toxic issues of the late 1980s and early 1990s, landfills, asbestos in buildings, and innumerable other problems led to an estimated bill for cleanup that topped $90 million. The Pentagon had become accustomed to being unresponsive to civilian concerns on this issue. It operated largely without public scrutiny before 1990 and successfully fended off outside observers even after congressional hearings in the late 1980s. At the Presidio, the Army relied on its longtime strategies and tried to defer the cleanup until after its departure. Its environmental assessment, one of the many National Environmental Policy Act requirements, indicated that the Army might not have the resources and the time to successfully mitigate some areas of the Presidio before the scheduled 1994 departure.[473]

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[471] Rep. Nancy Pelosi and Rep. Barbara Boxer to Amy Meyer, September 19, 1989, PFFGNRA II, Box 5, Government – U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi; John R. Moses, "Presidio's Future Uncertain," *SFI*, April 6, 1991; Ingfei Chen, "Army Says It Goofed - OKs Money for Presidio," *SFC*, February 12, 1992; Ingfei Chen, "Army Promises to Take Care of Presidio," *SFC*, November 14, 1992.

[472] Seth Shulman, *The Threat at Home: Confronting the Toxic Legacy of the U.S. Military* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Rothman, *Saving the Planet*, 196-99.

[473] Benton, *The Presidio*, 115-16.

The public outcry in the Bay Area against the Department of Defense (DOD) strategy was instantaneous. Many regarded the attempt to defer the cost of mitigation as part of a convoluted strategy to impede the transfer. The enormous cost of the cleanup could have easily crippled the entire Presidio transfer. The Park Service could not muster the resources to accelerate the timetable for cleanup and some park advocates observed, the public acknowledgment of toxicity at the Presidio compromised its national park qualities. The military's public image suffered even more, when after a series of surprise inspections, in May 1994, EPA officials fined the DOD more than $560,000 for sloppy handling of waste at the Presidio. Only after the formation of the Restoration Advisory Board for Environmental Cleanup, composed of volunteers from the Department of Defense, the Park Service, EPA, and citizen groups, did the public again begin to believe that the Army intended to follow through on the promises given in conjunction with the closing of the post. By the beginning of the new century, the Presidio Trust had secured $100 million for environmental remediation and an additional $100 million insurance policy against future clean-up needs.[474]

Military reticence stemmed from a number of factors. Its long history at the Presidio invoked sentimental feelings about the place, for the military remained one of the very few institutions in American society with respect for the lessons of history. Defense policies had been formed in an earlier era, when the military safeguarded the nation against vivid external threats and could count on Congress and the public overlooking any hazards associated with its requirements. Nor was the military accustomed to functioning in the harsh light of public opinion. During much of its tenure in the Bay Area, military leaders could cloak their action in claims of national security and in the odd case where such a strategy failed to sway opponents, could point to sheer volume of dollars the military generated as a persuasive tool. Even in the new climate, defense officials sometimes evinced an arrogant tone that inspired local resentment. "Contrary to some public sentiment or comments from some local leaders that the U.S. Army has not been a great steward of the environment at the Presidio, this is not supported by historical records," Lieutenant Colonel David McClure opined at the height of the toxic crisis. Facing as much as a $90 million clean-up bill, the Park Service did not seem to grasp the immensity of the task it faced.[475] In the post-Cold War world, the rules were different, and the military found itself accountable in new ways.

The tension of transfer manifested in other ways as well. Even though the eventual departure was a foregone conclusion, the Army became increasingly reluctant to entirely evacuate the Presidio as the transfer date drew near. BRAC's summer 1993 announcement that 400 military employees of the Sixth Army would remain at the Presidio after the scheduled closure date considerably altered the transfer. Recognizing that delayed departure was insignificant in the larger picture of the transfer and aware of the need for cooperation, the Park Service initially supported the move. The measure that allowed the soldiers to stay also included a clause that allowed the Army to hold any land it deemed necessary until the Secretary of the

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[474] Middleton interview, June 14, 2002; Elliot Diringer, "EPA Fines Presidio for Mishandling Waste," *SFC*, May 10, 1994; Diana Scott, "Presidio for Sale," *Monitor*, December 28, 1999; Benton, *The Presidio*, 116-17; Meyer interview, February 25, 2002, 26.

[475] Amy Meyer to Steve Haller, February 20, 2002; David McClure, "Closure Marks New Era for Presidio," *Star Presidian*, April 22, 1994; Robert D. Kaplan, *An Empire Wilderness: Travels into America's Future* (New York: Random House, 1998), 3-20.

Army deemed it excess to defense purposes. In November 1993, Congress passed the bill without significant dissent.[476]

A small cadre in Congress recognized danger in the bill, but for different reasons. Rep. Bruce Vento of Minnesota, chair of the House Interior Department Subcommittee on National Parks, Rep. George Miller III of the East Bay, who depended on Phil Burton for support in his initial election to the House in 1974, and Rep. Nancy Pelosi all thought the legislation significantly revised the terms of the post closure. With the clause that left the change of administration to the Secretary of the Army, the Pentagon could halt the transfer without consultation. The three complained to Secretary of Defense Les Aspin in a private letter, but the story leaked to the San Francisco area press. Again public opinion assisted the transfer of the Presidio. The press loudly inveighed against the bill, claiming that the Army sought to circumvent the transfer. In December 1993, the military confirmed the newspapers' fears. With quiet support from Rep. Ron Dellums, the chair of the House Armed Services Committee, the Army declared its intention to keep the headquarters at the Main Post, the commissary, swimming pool, Officers' Club, some housing, the youth service center, and the golf course. Dellums' maneuvering helped the Army keep most of the amenities that the Presidio provided, keeping some of the choice advantages of the post for the military, its retirees, and its dependents alone. The Park Service also counted on the Army's presence as a source of revenue in its financial assessments.[477]

The Army's stated intentions opened a question that loomed large over the entire transfer: whose Presidio was it really? The base golf course was one of the primary perquisites of the post, and in the golf-happy but golf course-shy Bay Area, the public coveted the exclusive course. When the Army left the Presidio, Pat Sullivan of the *San Francisco Chronicle* quipped, "the Bay Area's legions of public-course golfers will be poised to storm the fort." Opening the course to the public had been an express goal of the Presidio planning document, which was formulated as an amendment to the general management plan. Howard Levitt, communications chief at Golden Gate National Recreation Area, announced that under the Park Service, "the doctrine of full public access and fairness will prevail" at the golf course. The Park Service expected to lease it to a concessioner as it did with a similar course in Yosemite National Park; estimates of the revenue it would generate ranged between $800,000 and $1 million per year.[478] The Army's decision to keep it under military administration was widely regarded as an act of bad faith. The golf course promised an important source of revenue for the Presidio as a park, and stripping it from the transfer seemed a declaration of war on the process, an attempt to use administrative fiat to hamstring the transfer. If such a decision stood, local observers believed, the Presidio would be compromised financially and in the end the Park Service could not meet its financial and management obligations.

The Department of Defense–Department of the Interior conflict over the golf course also highlighted another important impact of the transfer. If the decision stood, Army control of the golf course would keep it exclusive, defying one of the most important community objectives for the Presidio and playing into the larger questions about access that continued to vex American

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[476] "Army's New Role at the Presidio," *SFC*, October 21, 1993; Benton, *The Presidio*, 117; Bruce Bellingham and Maggie McCall, "The Presidio: Analysis and Report," *Marina Times*, May 1994.

[477] Benton, *The Presidio*, 118; Bartke to Haller, March 5, 2002.

[478] Pat Sullivan, "From Generals Admission to General Admission," *SFC*, May 7, 1994; Phillip Matier and Andrew Ross, "Army Wants to Stay the (Golf) Course," *SFC*, November 22, 1993.

society. By the mid-1990s, exclusivity in American society had become fashion; the run-up of the stock market in the 1990s accentuated the 1980s trend toward class definition and the wealth it created sent people in search of all kind of amenities. Public spaces bore this burden. In some places they were transformed into private or semi-private spaces; in others they received much greater use as a result of the closure of formerly open space. In the Bay Area, with its strong tradition of civil liberty and its emphasis on community and grassroots organization, keeping the golf course exclusive reflected a wider trend that many thought simply wrongheaded and even anti-democratic.

The always vocal Bay Area press kept the focus on the attempt to keep the golf course in military hands. The struggle was dubbed "Operation Divot Storm," a tacit tongue-in-cheek critique of the use of military power and political capital for so nefarious and self-serving an objective. Retired Army officers were adamant about continuing to receive preference on the golf course. The Presidio Golf Club assiduously fought to retain its prerogative, at one point hiring William Whalen, the former general Superintendent of Golden Gate National Recreation Area and director of the Park Service, to lobby its case. Public opinion was allied against the Army, and even Whalen could not help. "It was less beneficial to the Presidio Golf Club to have him [Whalen] than if they had not had him," Pacific West Regional Director and former Presidio General Manager John Reynolds recalled.[479] The Army once again became the object of scorn and distrust; the ever-present Farley cartoon strip lambasted the military in a week-long series. Pulled to the table by public opinion, the Army began what became a year of negotiations that led to compromise. The agreement stipulated a five-year phase-in of public use of the golf course; at the end of the phase-in period, fifty percent of the tee times would be slated for public use. After the five-year interim period, the Park Service would assume administrative responsibility for the course, although some tee times would continue to be reserved for military use.[480]

The vast number of structures in the Presidio also attracted the attention of homeless advocates. The incredible cost of living in the Bay Area and the lack of available space contributed to increasing homelessness, and in the 1980s and 1990s, the homeless in many communities found a voice. In San Francisco, they attracted considerable sympathy. A 1991 *San Francisco Examiner*/KRON-TV survey indicated that the largest percentage of those polled, more than thirty-five percent, believed that the Presidio should be converted to homeless housing and job training. This number was twenty percentage points higher than those who thought the Presidio should become a park. "People have an urge to do something about" homelessness, a *San Francisco Examiner editorial* opined. "Whether or not there is a realistic prospect for using the Presidio for homeless housing it will take something that dramatic to make real progress."[481]

Homeless housing was one of many options for the Presidio and while it garnered some advocacy, it also generated antipathy and considerable indifference. In 1991, a Bay Area delegation to Congress included homelessness among the issues for which it sought support, but San Francisco Mayor Art Agnos opposed using the Presidio for the homeless. One area of the post became the focus of efforts to create housing. The Wherry Housing area, used for enlisted

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[479] Reynolds interview, May 18, 1999, 6, unedited transcript.

[480] Benton, *The Presidio*, 118-19.

[481] Gerald D. Adams, "San Franciscans Say Give Presidio to the Homeless," *SFE*, June 27, 1991; "An Urge to Act on Homelessness," *SFE*, June 28, 1991; Meyer to Haller, February 25, 2002.

housing, was slated for demolition. After the GMP Amendment, it was located in an area scheduled to be returned to coastal prairie and scrub. Homeless advocates sought the space for the disadvantaged, but were rebuffed. In May 1994, just before the scheduled transfer, the California Homeless Network sponsored a protest in which homeless advocates occupied part of the Wherry Housing Area above Baker Beach. At least 100 people participated in the demonstration. In the end, Wherry housing became an important source of revenue for the Presidio, generating as much as $12 million per year by the early 2000s.[482]

Letterman Hospital and the Letterman Army Institute for Research (LAIR) also became the focus of controversy during the transfer. The hospital played an integral role in the community, serving military personnel, dependents, and all other Department of Defense beneficiaries. A total of 128,000 people in the Bay Area were eligible for care at Letterman, and its closure three years before the Park Service took control limited them to two other military hospitals in the area, one of which soon closed. As the transfer approached, veterans and their advocates pressured the Park Service to reopen the hospital. Despite this demand, the Park Service, planning proceeded in another direction. "The National Park Service is not in the business of running a veterans' hospital," said planning team captain Don Neubacher as the agency announced its plans. The change created a difficult situation and the initial announcement of the transfer brought loud protest. But at the same time, many looked longingly at the hospital and LAIR, coveting the facilities for other purposes. "There's no doubt that the Letterman/LAIR complex is a very desirable asset," noted Kent Sims, deputy executive director of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency. The Park Service desperately needed an anchor tenant for the facility, one that could significantly demonstrate that the Presidio transfer was more than an expensive boondoggle.[483] A paying tenant of stature granted the entire project a gravity it previously lacked and the array of medical and research facilities in the Bay Area offered plenty of possibilities.

The Park Service rushed headlong into a process designed to yield a suitable tenant and soon found much community opposition. With special legislation that allowed Park Service to enter into a long-term lease at Letterman, the park selected two respondents for consideration from the sixteen who submitted proposals to the Request for Qualifications to Lease Buildings. The University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) entered into negotiations for the entire 1.2 million square feet of the Letterman complex. UCSF planned the Presidio Center for Health Science Research and Education. The Tides Foundation sought 73,000 square feet for the Thoreau Center for Sustainability. UCSF's significance was enormous. Former San Francisco Mayor George Christopher regarded UCSF as the ideal tenant for the old hospital and the *San Francisco Examiner* declared that "the Presidio and UCSF are a superb fit." UCSF did not want to be a full partner in the process, expecting the Park Service not only to accommodate its demands for renovation but also to waive rent for use of the space. Some believed UCSF was only interested in the federal dollars administrators believed would come along with the project.

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[482] Ingfei Chen, "Agnos Tells His Plans for Presidio," *SFC*, July 9, 1991; David Crosson, "31 Leaders Visit Washington to Lobby for More Money for Homeless, Presidio," *SFE*, September 24, 1991; Erin McCormick, "Homeless Try Takeover of Presidio Apartments," *SFE*, May 3, 1994; Stephen Schwartz, "32 Held in Homeless Protest," *SFC*, May 3, 1994.

[483] "Presidio Hospital Battle," *SFI*, December 14, 1993; "Retired and Disabled Vets Furious Over Letterman Closure - Ask Help," Marina *Times*, March 1992; Peter Tira, "Ongoing Battle to Save Letterman Medical Center," *SFI*, April 12, 1994; Benton, *The Presidio*, 237-38; Martin Espinoza, "The Presidio Power Grab," *SFBG*, January 12, 1994.

As 1994 ended, the relationship between UCSF and the Park Service collapsed and the university pulled out of the process. The Tides Foundation's 73,000-square foot Thoreau Center for Sustainability took its place in the complex, a much smaller operation than the Park Service had hoped for.[484]

Despite conflict in these and more areas, the logistics of the transfer proceeded if not easily, at least with direction. Although a weary Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt "learned that in San Francisco, there are 2 million experts on the future of the Presidio," momentum and skilled political maneuvering by Rep. Pelosi carried the transfer forward despite the objections of Rep. Duncan and others. Money to accomplish the transfer was not going to be easy to find, but "we can squeeze more productivity out of the Washington-based operation," the secretary insisted. In March 1994, the Park Service assumed control of Presidio housing. Obstacles to the process remained, and as October approached, Congress wrangled over the long-term fate of the Presidio, neighbors worried about the impact of the changes, and the Park Service readied itself for the most formidable task in its history.[485]

On September 30, 1994, the Army transferred all remaining parts of the Presidio to the Park Service. At 4:00 P.M., the Presidio's Sixth Army Garrison and Headquarters Battalion became inactivated and the Army conducted a formal retreat ceremony, lowering the flag for the last time. At 11:00 P.M., the Army sounded "taps," and between that moment and sunrise, signs at the seven gates that announced entry to a military reservation were replaced with ones that read "Welcome to the Presidio of San Francisco, Golden Gate National Recreation Area." At 12:00 P.M. on October 1, 1994, Vice President Al Gore presided over a post-to-park ceremony at the main parade ground. After 218 years of military service, the Presidio became part of the national park system.[486]

The Army's departure was long awaited and simultaneously cataclysmic. As the soldiers marched out of the post for the last time, a new era began. The Presidio became part of Golden Gate National Recreation Area. It was a new entity, an addition to the national park system, but clearly the conventions that governed most park areas simply would not suffice for the Presidio. In the way that Golden Gate National Recreation Area symbolized what national parks could become, the Presidio encapsulated the issues and advantages of the entire park in one space. Small in comparison with the rest of Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the Presidio was enormous in the consequences that stemmed from decisions about it. The transfer compelled everyone—the Park Service, GGNPA, the Presidio Council, the Army, and the Bay Area community—to move beyond negotiations. It compelled the articulation of a vision for the city and the rest of the Bay Area, a way in which the region would function for decades to come and it made every entity associated with it declare its position. While many saw the road to the

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[484] George Christopher, "The Presidio Should Be Made into a Campus for UCSF," *SFC*, March 12, 1992; 'Paying for the Presidio," *SFE*, August 26, 1993; Martin Espinoza, "UC's Presidio Prescription," *SFBG*, March 30, 1994; Benton, *The Presidio*, 237-38; Bartke to Haller, March 5, 2002.

[485] Marc Sandalow, "Babbitt 'Wearily Confident' about Future of Presidio," *SFC*, February 1, 1994; Peter Tira, "New Construction at Presidio," *SFI*, April 12, 1994; Carolyn Lochhead, "Push in House to Lease Parts of Presidio," *SFC*, May 11, 1994; Neil D. Eisenberg, "The Rape of the Presidio," *SFBG*, September 14, 1994; Neil D. Eisenberg, "An Open Letter to the People of the Bay Area," *SFBG*, September 14, 1994; Martin Espinoza, "Death of a Park," *SFBG*, December 14, 1994; Meyer to Haller, February 25, 2002.

[486] Michael Dorgan, "Swords to Plowshares: A Jewel of a Transition," *SJMN*, September 30, 1994; Gerald D. Adams, "New Era for Presidio," *SFE*, October 1, 994; Carl Nolte, "Presidio Soldiers Furl Their Colors," *SFC*, October 1, 1994.

transfer as the battle, the real struggle began at the moment of the Army's departure, when the amendment to the GMP became the governing policy for the Presidio and changes to the document signified power relationships that stretched all the way to Washington, D.C. The Presidio was no mere addition to a national park area. It was instead an embodiment of regional aspirations. A new story began in the aftermath of the hand-over.

The process of transfer shaped the Presidio's future. The former military post was an enormous endeavor, an addition to one of the most complicated parks to manage in the entire park system. It came at a time when the National Park Service was at its weakest, when it lacked resources and to a certain degree direction, and when it was least able to resist outside entreaties. The Park Service offered a model for a new kind of park and lobbied for it, leading to the creation of the Presidio Trust, and Congress added the clause that if the Presidio did not pay for itself by 2013, then it could be carved from the park system and sold. Here, so long-time advocates such as Rich Bartke believed the process went wrong. When the Trust was made independent of the Department of the Interior, a measure of oversight was lost, and when it was required to pay for itself in 2013, public management options were curtailed. The circumstances surrounding the implementation of the Trust legislation showed the many ways in which a project such as the Presidio could be pulled. Rep. Pelosi countered a hostile legislative climate and successfully shepherded legislation that allowed the Presidio to remain a park through the "Contract with America" Congress during Newt Gingrich's term as Speaker of the House. By any account, this was a remarkable achievement. Its cost to the Park Service was high. The legislation required that the Presidio Trust report to the President and not the Department of the Interior. A segment of the local constituency was alienated, some as a result of the changes involved, others as a result of watching the process of making of the law. The change in lines of authority pushed the Presidio into a new category, different from Golden Gate National Recreation Area of which it was part as well as the remaining 378 units of the park system. The result was a tremendous strain on Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the park system, overmatched by the scope and scale of the project and hamstrung by politics. Even though in some accounts, the Park Service was beginning to reach an appropriate level of management when Congress gave responsibility to the Presidio Trust, the Presidio still strained Golden Gate National Recreation Area's resources. "We were out of control and in deep trouble before the Presidio came along," Doug Nadeau recounted in the least optimistic version of the moment. "The Presidio sucked up so much time, energy and commitment that it just set the park in a spin."[487]

While Nadeau's comments might have seemed extreme, they were widely echoed in more measured form. Superintendent Brian O'Neill tacitly agreed when he observed that "we were burnt out and overextended and there had been so many things we couldn't attend to" that the creation of the Trust "in one way was a blessing." O'Neill astutely assessed the crux of the problem in a discussion of the relationship between the park and the Army during the transfer. "We knew that in the Army system very little is delegated down in terms of power to resource issues," he strategized. "I think clearly our ability to succeed was going to be dependent on our political access to the very highest levels of the Department of Defense." This capsule illustrated

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[487] Nadeau interview, October 6, 1998, 66; Ric Borjes, e-mail to Steve Haller, July 7, 2000; Bartke to Haller, march 5, 2002; Donald J. Hellmann, "The Path of the Presidio Trust Legislation," *Golden Gate University Law Review*, 28 n. 3 (Spring 1998): 319- 98; Benton, *The Presidio*, 113-46; "The Presidio Sellout: A Chronology," *SFBG*, March 30, 1994; Diana Scott, "Presidio for Sale."

the Park Service's problem. It could have the Presidio, but without the resources to operate it, administration was an academic exercise. Securing the resources meant ceding some autonomy in management, a practice at which Golden Gate National Recreation Area had been skilled since the 1970s. In this situation, the power of the players was much greater than the park ever experienced and their consequent demands mirrored their status and position. Securing the Presidio became much more than passage of a bill; it became a process of integrating a series of complicated relationships with political forces, social organizations, and the local community, all of whom were simultaneously benefactors but had specific needs to which they felt their participation and contribution to the process entitled them. "No matter what Brian O'Neill, the Director of the Park Service, or Greg Moore [executive director of GGNPA] or anyone else who believed in the Presidio said," O'Neill insisted, "it simply wasn't going to happen unless we had a strong voice from a national constituency. ...It was absolutely essential to the Park Service that its voice be echoed by a cross-section of Americans who had the credentials to be able to advance thinking." Such people uniformly came with ideas of their own.[488]

Faced with the choice of having the Presidio with the help of powerful friends with ideas of their own or risking its loss, the Park Service had little choice. "There was a fairly uniform buy-in" to the concept of a partnership entity, O'Neill recalled, "the early version defined a different partnership than what we know the Presidio Trust legislation ended up with." The agency developed relationships that it needed to sustain the Presidio and became part of a larger operation. O'Neill played a significant role in achieving that end. O'Neill had "always been a really good partner. He really does value not only the concept, but the actual working of partnerships--understanding that they can be difficult, understanding that there's give and take, and--but ultimately convinced that it's the best thing to do, not only for the park, but for the community that surrounds the park," Middleton observed. "He's a great advocate of pulling in community to help restore public assets." What began as a park became a partnership; then it morphed into a different partnership, where in part as a defense against the vagaries of Congress, the Trust became the dominant partner. Even though the Park Service and Presidio Trust were "sister federal agencies,' in the words of Amy Meyer, a fundamental difference for Golden Gate National Recreation Area existed in this case. The Park Service did not control the partnership with the Trust as it did all similar relationships at the park. In that process, the Presidio became more than a hybrid. It pointed to a new definition of national park area, one that differed greatly from the history of the national park system. Unlike every other unit in the system, the Presidio was compelled to pay its own way after a fixed date. Every decision that managers for the Trust made was conditioned by that fact, and the weight of finances and the implied threat of sale of the former Army post challenged the concept of "parks for the people where the people are," the original idea behind Golden Gate National Recreation Area. As Golden Gate National Recreation Area survived by passing on costs to park partners such as GGNPA, the Presidio, with its combination of exceptional space and national cachet, might have been able to accomplish something similar. When survival hinged on financial leverage, power relationships dictated new values. In arguably the most liberal city in the nation, the "money talks" philosophy of postmodern America, a nation of markets driven to consume, seemed to have won out. When Regional Director John Reynolds called the Presidio "unique" in a speech to a 2000 interpretation conference, he correctly labeled this divergent part of Golden Gate National Recreation Area.[489]

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[488] O'Neill interview, May 19, 1999.

[489] Middleton interview, June 14, 2002; Meyer to Haller, February 25, 2002; Mai-Liis Bartling to Steve Haller,

The Park Service accomplished a great deal during its short stint of control of the Presidio. It developed the GMPA, attained and kept the support of a wide segment of the Bay Area public, and with the help of Rep. Pelosi and Rep. John Murtha, secured considerable funding for infrastructure and building renovation and rehabilitation and environmental clean-up. The Park Service also smoothly handled a complex transition from the military, secured annual operating budgets of upwards of $25,000,000 as well as additional revenues from leasing and successfully managed a transition to a smaller level of involvement after the establishment of the Trust. Most important, the agency did not bend when it came to the implementation of its core values in resource management, sustainability, historic preservation, and other similar areas.[490] In short, the Park Service managed the Presidio as a park, passing it to the Presidio Trust under those terms. The subsequent tension between the Park Service and the Trust resulted from differences in situation and philosophy. Was the Presidio going to feel like it was part of a national park? Was it a model for the future or an anomaly among national park partnerships?

For the national park system, the Presidio experience asked hard questions about public-private partnerships. National parks required outside support and since 1919, organizations aided the parks. Rarely had they been partners, co-managers with status equal to the Park Service. In a changing America, one in which nearly everything else in the nation had become "pay for play" and which national parks no longer held the kind of meaning that Huey Johnson, the founder of the Trust for Public Land, or Stephen T. Mather might grant them, an experiment with public-private management made social sense. It allowed the park system to accommodate a hostile Congress and an excited city simultaneously, and it appeared at least initially that the Park Service could maintain control. By the time the Army marched out in 1994, that control was beginning to wane, and in its own park the agency seemed less and less the master of its destiny. "I consider the Trust/Park Service relationship to be akin to a marriage and we've had our ups and downs," Craig Middleton summed up the process. "Certainly some of the downs have been around the concern by Park Service people that this would become a model, and be used over and over, and it would be used by people who wanted to make the Park Service self-sufficient in some way. And it just doesn't apply. And I think that we've understood now that this is unique."[491] With the experience of the Presidio, it was easy to see why the Park Service might shy away from future opportunities in public-private partnerships.

In the end, after considerable grappling, the Presidio became an autonomous entity, separate from the rest of Golden Gate National Recreation Area in significant ways. In part that transformation stemmed from politics in Washington, D.C., but it came equally from the way the power relationships were set up in the Presidio Trust and the park. On the executive level, the Presidio remained part of the park; in its operations, it became an entity that espoused Park Service standards but answered directly to Washington through a series of mechanisms far different than agency protocol. As 2000 dawned the result was perplexing. The Presidio was both part of Golden Gate National Recreation Area and a de facto redevelopment agency, both public

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September 21, 2000, copy in possession of the author.

[490] Mai-Liis Bartling to Steve Haller, September 21, 2000, copy in possession of the author.

[491] Middleton interview, June 14, 2002.

open space and private facility, both recreational park and research park. Its complicated status stood astride the blurring line between public and private in the United States.